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ABSTRACT

Following up research by Radway and others on readers of romance novels, a study, employing a reader-response approach, was conducted with 18 female adolescent readers of romances to discover if they perceived and enjoyed the novels in ways appreciably different from other readers. The subjects filled out questionnaires about their romance novel reading habits, were interviewed about their backgrounds and personal lives, and were observed selecting books at a bookstore. The data suggest that young women construct and internalize romance novels in a unique way according to their experiences, and choose to read them (1) to get information on males and sexual technique; (2) to escape their lives by identifying with the heroines and thereby feel better about themselves; and (3) to "practice" vicariously cultural experiences and social behaviors they have yet to experience. The latter reason is compounded by the adolescents' need to psychologically break away from their parents. The novels assist by satisfying their need for identity, which they derive from identifying with independent heroines. Further research is needed on how readers construct and internalize the novels. (References and sample questionnaires are included.) (JC)

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UNDERSTANDING THE APPEAL OF THE ROMANCE NOVEL FOR THE ADOLESCENT GIRL: A READER-RESPONSE APPROACH

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"It's like...last night...when I stepped into the snow... I felt serene...and even when they're fighting, and I get so frustrated...but I have to tell myself, so I don't get too wrapped up in it, that it's going to be all right in the end...I really get into them..."

--Ari-ane, excerpt from first interview, January 1987

The romance novel, as popular culture artifact, has been the site of struggle for many social and literary critics who have attempted to explain and to interpret the romance novel text and its appeal to the reader. Modleski's (1982) textual analysis of Harlequin novels and gothic romances offers the reading that these two kinds of romances serve as revenge strategies for the reader struggling against the male and patriarchy at large. Radway's (1984) ethnographic approach to understanding adult readers of romances suggests their conscious need for escape, as well as their deeper need for nurturance in a patriarchal society. Representative voices who view romance-reading as feminist defeat are: Mussell (1981), who complains the stories are all the same, simplistic, and unreal; Hazen (in Mussell, 1981, p 22), who claims the books function as rape fantasy; and Douglas (in Radway, 1984, p 4), who expresses concern that these books encourage women to give in to male sexuality and brutality.

This recognition of the current struggle being waged over the interpretation and acknowledged "power" of the romance novel serves the purposes of this study. My study enters the fray, not by contradicting or by accepting these reasons offered for adult romance reading (although I will touch on some of these established reasons in the course of this paper), but by calling attention, instead, to another audience of romance readers, the female adolescent. In fact, a significant number of today's female

teenagers are choosing to read these same romance novels as their primary leisure-time activity, but they are constructing/internalizing and creating meaning from these texts in different ways from the adult reader.

This study, as a preliminary look into the female adolescent's reading habits, retains the notion of struggle in order to argue that only through an understanding of the teenager's reading of romances as a leisure-time activity situated within the context of her other leisure activities and within the context of the other concerns and pressures she feels in her day-to-day, lived experiences, can an accurate understanding of teenage romance reading be accomplished. I want to suggest that the "figure" of struggle, or conflict, is very real in the life of today's young woman,[2] for example, as she feels conflicts such as breaking away from parental and authority figures, establishing in turn narcissistic feelings of self-esteem, needing to establish firmer same-sex relationships and awakening to heterosexual relationships, and simply enjoying a fantasy escape from her surroundings. My reading of how the young reader of romance novels constructs these texts is not one of feminine defeat, or revenge, or nurturance, however. What I hope to present in this initial study are some of the ways that the female adolescent gains real pleasure from the reading of and identification with the text; indeed, more than just a socialization experience, the reading activity allows her to experience the "real" through the "symbolic"--in Baudrillard's sense, collapsing the image into the real--which gives her a sense of personal empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an audience-response, or in Radway's terms, a reader-response approach. This recent trend toward direct observation and personal interviews with the popular culture audience affords concrete and culture-specific insights which might not be available through textual analyses or meta-theoretical interpretations of reading strategies. Radway's (1984) study of the Smithton Readers, adult homemakers who read romances, and Morley's ( ) and Walkerdine's ( ) studies of television use are recent attempts to employ the ethnographic approach, where the participant-observer/critic enters the cultural and social context of the group under study. McRobbie (1982) also calls for "participant observation" and ethnographic sociology although she cautions us to recognize the inherent biases present in the observer, the observed, and the social setting which necessarily "color" the findings.

My study included eighteen female adolescent subjects, contacted through the assistance of Dr. Terry Fry, English teacher at Bloomington High School, Bloomington, Illinois, who volunteered to be interviewed as to their romance-reading habits. Fourteen informants attend BHS, and four informants attend Normal Community High School, Normal, Illinois. The Bloomington-Normal area is largely a white-collar, middle-class community, having two universities and three major corporations as primary employers.

All eighteen subjects first filled out written questionnaires asking for information on reading habits and personal demographics. (See Appendix A) The questionnaire was designed as an open-ended instrument, in Agar's (1980) terms a "frame-elicitation" instrument, which sought free responses, short

essay-type answers rather than multiple choice answers. My purpose was to get natural, longer responses than could possibly be afforded by a more limited, multiple-choice style of questionnaire.

All eighteen were subsequently interviewed orally in an information-gathering interview which reviewed and elaborated the information on the written instrument and which sought additional information on reading habits. (See Appendix B) These individual interviews were about 45 minutes in length and were all tape-recorded.

I followed up these initial interviews by interviewing, a second time, five subjects in order to collect a more in-depth, life history interview, which is an in-depth chronological detailing of the informant's life events. I collected one genealogy, a tracing of the subject's "family tree". I also conducted two group interviews, with three subjects and with four subjects. I also "hung out" in the halls of BHS, observing the interaction of the students with friends and teachers (the fights and disagreements were the most interesting to observe), and I was able to participate with the teenagers in a unique way when I accompanied several of them to the book store where they explained, with vigor, the different lines or series of romances, their particular preferences, their dislikes, etc. I also sent questionnaires (See Appendix C) to both parents of the readers; I received ten responses from parents (20 total).

I think it important to note the sincere cooperation and serious attempts of the readers to give me detailed answers and to convey the degree of importance that reading these books has in their lives. The fact that I was working with volunteers certainly tends to create a sample

of interested and cooperative subjects. Every person showed up on time for every interview, and many talked for hours, eagerly giving details of the books and revealing their personal feelings about the books and and about their families and personal lives. Indeed, on two occasions I was unable to contact two students, but they got in touch with me. An interesting example of the influence of these books which suggests the degree to which some readers emerge themselves into the text and identify with the character of heroine is suggested by their choice of pseudonyms which I asked for in case I quoted them directly in the study: Alexis, Ari-ane, Ashleigh, Ashley Alexis, Kasey, Jesse, Sophia Kristianna, Laurwren, to name a few. In any case, the subjects seemed anxious to talk to a sympathetic listener.

INTER-ACTION OF CULTURAL PRACTICES

Having noted the value of an ethnographic, reader-response approach and having explained a bit about my informants and my procedure, I want now to emphasize the importance of a "holistic" approach (See, for example, Morley,) to understanding the responses of the participants. That is, I want to situate these teenagers' reading practices within and against both (1) the felt and underlying pressures experienced by the maturing adolescent in our culture and (2) the various cultural practices and leisure-time activities available to today's teenager. My cultural studies approach requires a kind of "mapping out" among social, sexual, cultural, political and lived experience in order to understand the interacting forces of the historically-specific, cultural context (while realizing that no social context can be absolutely explained or "mapped out"). At the

same time, psychological theories on adolescent needs and behavior can help explain some of the pressures experienced by young adults today, which also informs our "cultural map."

The move away from the simple encoding-decoding model which posits a direct link between textual meaning and the reader's appropriation of said meaning is a refreshing advance in cultural criticism (See, for example, Morley, , p 45) Further, the suggestion that ideology firmly embedded in a cultural or literary text "speaks" the viewer/reader who is, in turn, a passive "absorber" of hidden, controlling meanings is being re-evaluated and called into question. (See, for example, Woollacott, 1986, p 208) As a result, we see a turn away from studies such as Mattelart's (1979) reading of women's magazines and Dorfman and Mattelart's (1975) study on comic books as cultural products embodying and glorifying the ideology of the dominant class. Instead, critics are approaching the study of a particular cultural practice or a cultural product by studying its interaction with other practices, products, or "texts." (Modeski, ; Morley, ; McRobbie, ,1980; Bennett and Woollacott, ; Walkerdine,)

Reading as Primary Leisure Activity

I want to establish the importance of the female adolescent's reading as leisure-time practice within everyday activities. An examination of the responses of my sample reveals that reading romances is the primary leisure-time activity for most of my informants. In fact, when I asked what they would do for leisure if they could not read romances, almost every reader paused and had to think for several moments before responding. Several asked, "You mean if I couldn't read romances at all!" Table I

reveals that most of the sample would have to be considered habitual readers. Three subjects are reading at least six to twenty books a month, and all but four readers are creating time to read at minimum two to three books up to five a month. When this fact is coupled with the ages that most began reading--eleven to thirteen years of age--it is easy to believe most readers when they claim to have read literally hundreds of these books. Four of the girls estimate they have read 750 to 850 books total, while ten more of the readers have read 200 to 480 books each.

TABLE I SOME DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF READERS IN SAMPLE:

freshman	two readers
sophomore	five
junior	five
senior	six

ESTIMATED BOOKS READ PER MONTH: (average for year, but more read in the summer months)

15-20 books	one reader(s)	
10-12	three	
6-10	two	
4-5	three	2-5 eight readers
2-5	two	
3	one	
2-3	two	
1	two	
1 every few months	one	
2 per year	one	

AGE BEGAN TO READ ROMANCES:

fifth grade/ten years old	two readers
sixth grade/eleven	four
seventh grade/twelve	five
eighth grade/thirteen	five
freshman, hs/fourteen	two

KINDS OF BOOKS READ:
(most read more than one kind, ie, they read Harlequins and Sweet Valley Highs or historical/adults and Harlequins, etc.)

Harlequins	seven readers
historical, adult romances (Danielle Steele, etc.)	eight readers
teenage lines: Sweet Valley High, First Love, Judy Blume, etc.	eight readers

The readers' responses seem to indicate that rather than choosing between reading romances or watching television and opting for one activity over the other, given a particular mood or disposition at the time, most of these readers prefer the romance reading practice and make time to do it. The overwhelming majority of the readers reported reading late at night and on weekends, and half report also reading during school and at home when they are supposed to be doing homework. For example, Stephanie reports, "You can watch television for half an hour, but after that, you're left there. But if you read, you can keep going; the story can keep building; it prolongs the time you can change who you are." Christine's response--"If I get into a really good book, I carry it around constantly and read it every chance I get"--and Lynne's response--"Basically I read any time I can. I love it."--are typical of most of the readers.

The nature of reading romances as a leisure practice appears to be that it provides a portable and intensely absorbing fantasy escape. The books can be carried in a purse and when time permits, easily snatched and read. The final section of this paper will analyze the depth of feeling the readers experience, but a brief reference here to the books' power to provide intense and immediate fantasy escape can establish its nature as a mass medium. As Stephanie tells us above, television viewing is considered a fleeting experience, the fantasy and enjoyment over when the program is finished, while reading novels can create a lasting feeling. Bridget and Ashley Alexis claim that they can see a book on the shelf and recover the feeling they had reading it. Bridget, in fact, explained to me her card catalog system for identifying books. One of my 850 plus readers, Bridget fills out a three by five index card recording every book she has read, so

that she can go back and re-read books for certain characters, stories, feelings, etc.

Nancy represents several readers who explain, "Sometimes I save a book. If it's really good, I don't want to read it too fast." Several readers claim to feel sad when they get finished with a book--even though the endings are happy. In other words, it would seem that the feeling of joy for the hero and heroine inspires tears of satisfaction and at the same time, there is regret that this intense pleasurable experience is finished. Lynne explains, "You get a feeling when you put the book down that a part of you has passed." We will explore later intense identification with actors and the story but suffice it to say here that the book as medium provides a simple narrative formula and clear-cut "heroic" characters which are easily recognized, provides an immediate and intense escape from surroundings, and is an activity which can be done by any teenager when she has the time to pick up a book and read it. Several girls said they will have two books going at one time: Lynne says, "I'll start one but then I'll be somewhere else and I'll have to start another one." Ashley relates, "I read them wherever I am...I'm so hooked. It's a habit. Once you start reading, you can't put them down...Like Jay's potato chips, I can't stop reading them." And in a group interview Sophia Kristianna explained that when her best friend Ashley is visiting her house, she won't let Ashley read the books, "I won't let Ashley read at my house. She can't even open the book because then she won't know that I'm around."

When asked to what degree they shared the books with their friends, a couple readers responded that they occasionally will discuss a particularly good book with a fellow reader. The overwhelming response, however, was

that the only conversations were simply to recommend a book to another person. All the readers commented that their circle of friends probably contained more non-readers than fellow-readers, so it would seem that the reading practice does not serve as any great bonding mechanism for friendships. As a result, the readers are pursuing the reading practice as a personal pleasure, not one necessarily shared with close friends. And even though brief references to books may be made, the readers seem to feel no real compulsion to review again or discuss with friends books they have read. The reading seems to be, for the female adolescent, a privately-pursued, individual pleasure.

These novels seem to function also as disposable commodities. Group interviews revealed an elaborate network of exchange for the books--among moms, older sisters, aunts, friends, etc. I realized when well into the research that when I asked about how they got the books, almost no one responded that they bought them. It seems that one book can easily circulate among ten to twenty people. Indeed, the teenagers explained the best books were the ones that were worn, could bend, and even had the pages falling out. Importantly, they explained that they liked the fact that others were reading and feeling the same thing they had felt. Jesse even said, as did others, that she did not like to get the books from the library because,"It seems public and I don't like that." Although one reader remarked she got angry when she didn't get a book back, most expected to pass on a book and never see it again. In sum, there seems to be a real pleasure in performing the reading activity as an individual, "isolated", adaptable practice, yet there is also pleasure in knowing other readers out there have read the same books and felt the same feelings.

Although several hesitated to name other pastimes and although the data indicate most are heavy readers, this is not to deny that these adolescent females do not engage in other leisure activities. Their second choice of leisure activity was watching television (evening soaps like Dynasty, Falcon Crest, etc., situation comedies, and daytime operas in the summer), followed closely by their third preference of just hanging around with friends or talking on the telephone. Activities receiving only one or two votes are walking, playing sports, daydreaming, dancing to music, latchhook, eating, listening to stereo or radio, and even writing a romance novel.

Some demographic data can shed light on why this sample is so skewed toward the practice of leisure reading. These readers are above-average students academically. Eleven of the eighteen report straight A's or A's and B's as their high school grades; of the remaining, the grades are reported as mainly B's or B's and C's. Also, the fact that this sample is composed of students who volunteered their time would seem to indicate the initiative of the better student. The fact that these readers are good students even makes more important the time they find for reading, which they must do in addition to their study load.

In review, the primary leisure activities of my informants are reading romances, followed by watching television, and being with friends. However, it remains that, for my sample, interest in reading matches and in many cases outweighs other activities; as noted above in representative comments, the extended nature of the fantasy experience, a particularly good book, or the reading practice itself takespreference over other activities. I realized late in my research the importance of other leisure choices which can be compared and matched to the reading practice, so more research needs to be

done to delve deeper into all kinds of teenage leisure practices so more connections to various activities can be made: to take an example, we could ask what else is going on in the house when they are reading the romances.

Also, future studies could explore the school-related extra-curricular activities of these students since the academically-strong students tend to be also active in band, drama, journalism, etc. In addition, a follow-up study on those readers who are not the intense or "avid" readers could shed entirely different uses of these books by the romance reader: in other words, it would be interesting to explore how adolescents reading only occasionally place the reading experience within their other activities. And finally, the fact that many romance readers prefer the soap opera as favorite television show needs to be examined more closely: in both cases, a fantasy drama, strong heroines, definite "good guys" and "bad guys", and the formula narrative structure are shared ~~shared~~ characteristics of both cultural products. The fact that several readers commented in passing on similarities between the soaps and the novels could be explored in the sense that one text, or formula, is recalling another, which calls to mind the work in this kind of cultural criticism exploring the intertextuality of texts, for example Bennett and Woollacott ( ) with studying Bond texts or McRobbie's (1980) call to place rock music in the context of other discourses.

Readers' Explanations for Romance's Appeal

I want to begin to explore in this section the feelings, pressures, and pleasures which seem to constitute these teenagers' lived experience

and relate how, in their comments on these novels, they are in some ways using the romance reading experience to help them satisfy or channel these felt sensitivities to their surroundings. The struggle they feel between what family and society expect of them and what they feel capable of accomplishing is managed, in one way, through this leisure reading practice. My understanding of their responses is that their main concerns can be classified as identity pressures, heterosexual interests, and social and economic expectations. In other words, the adolescent, male or female, experiences these social and personal forces sometimes in conflict with each other, at other times overlapping, and at times with one emerging as more important over another.

When we consider our culture's adolescents growing up in a society which tells them through television characters, advertisements, and other media that to be beautiful and to be rich and to be intelligent and educated is to be a success in our culture, it is not difficult to make a case for the teenager's experiencing of social pressures and parental demands to be attractive, get an education, get a good job, find a responsible mate, and have fun and enjoy yourself in the process (:)

This notion of attaining a sense of personal worth and recognition from significant others is particularly evident in my research. In the individual interviews and a group interview several commented on their fears of ridicule from other students, particularly during their junior high years. Christine expresses it well, "If people looked at me for any length of time or if they were laughing or talking behind my back, I always thought they were laughing at me." Several readers recounted painful memories from junior high and into senior high of how teasing because of clothes (One informant had to wear the same clothes often because of financial troubles

her mother encountered from a divorce.), of hair styles, and even of wearing a bra before other girls did devastated them, at the time.

Pressure from peers to "fit in" and conform to standards of beauty, fashion, and talk can be interpreted as being accommodated in the way the adolescent readers in my study overwhelmly related their identification with the heroine/"main woman character"/"main lady," etc. When I asked the open-ended question (not even mentioning heroine) of how do they feel when they read these books, twelve readers' first response was that they felt they were the girl in the story. For example, "Like I'm the main character... I can picture everything" "I feel great...like I'm the person" "I pretend I'm the person. What happens to her, happens to me." Morgan explains, "I feel like I'm the person--wishing I was like that. I carry that feeling around for a while. I read to get that feeling. Sometimes, I wish to be better than I am and when I read, I feel I am." Jesse agrees, "I feel great. Really. I love it. I don't know what it is. It's like I feel I'm the girl. I'm like her. Like I become the character...And if something bad happens and then they get back together. That's me too. When it works out..." Two other readers add they read "that people might understand me",and the books "make you feel good about yourself."

In another line of questioning when asked to describe the heroine, almost to the reader, every response began with the physical characteristics: tall, slender, beautiful, ivory skin, that English look, pretty, small, blond hair and blue eyes, black hair and green eyes, good complexion, long hair, perfect body, etc. Other characteristics were "really cool names, innocent, not worldly, at times snobby, intelligent, determined, popular, sophisticated but friendly, does things on her own, and the very common response, rich.

It is interesting to suggest that the importance of the physical characteristics, the preponderance of independence or self-reliant traits, and importantly, to be rich are some of the very characteristics the readers are feeling in their own lived experience. I want to avoid a simple reductionist claim here but point to the fact that current social standards of dress and personality seem to be revealed and accommodated in the importance the readers seem to be attaching to these traits in the books. It is interesting to note also that in all the responses about descriptions of and feelings toward characters in the novels, virtually the only characters mentioned were the hero and heroine; there seemed to be no real importance attached to any of the supporting characters.

Also developing as part of the adolescent's coming into adulthood, in addition to establishing feelings of self-identity and social recognition, is the natural awakening of interest in the opposite sex. (This comes as no surprise to anyone!) For my female adolescent sample their concerns in this realm of heterosexual awakening center on interests of wanting to know what boys are thinking and how to talk to guys, interest in sex technique, and finally, just wanting to have a boyfriend and have that feeling of being wanted and "loved," in this way fulfilling the social dictate of being married[4] or being in a relationship. Several informants commented that they read the books to find out what guys were thinking. Many explained that they enjoyed in the first experience of romance reading in junior high of the teenage romances, the lengthy conversations and good communication between the characters. It must be added that many readers state that this pleasure in the complete and lengthy communication between the hero and heroine continues to be one of the best features of any romance, adult or teenage. Ari-ane

explains how the need for effective talk, not realized in her junior high relationships with boys, was nevertheless fulfilled in the reading of the romance text, "In the books I could find out how they think and what they could do because when you're in junior high, you kind of stay away from them... because then I was so afraid of guys and you didn't know anything about them." Several agree that one of the best parts of the novels is that the characters enjoy perfect communication. Bridget explains, further, that "They understand each other's feelings, have perfect communication, and get along totally."

This vicarious enjoyment of the "talk" also carries over to the very important part of the narrative structure, the fights between the man and woman as they sustain their misunderstandings until the final plot reconciliation can be made. Lynne states that, "Things the heroine says I could never say. I could never say half the stuff they say to a guy. They <u>really</u> can tell them exactly what they're feeling and they don't mess around." Tracey also loves the fighting, "It's fun when they don't get along. You get the feeling they are in love but they can't show it...I love the fights." Two vicarious pleasures are being experienced here: in one instance, the ability to be able to say exactly what one feels to a man is a feat threatening and intimidating to these young women struggling to even initiate conversations with boys, and at the same time, their knowledge that the novel's formula always dictates a happy ending reassures them that even "telling a guy off" does not mean the relationship will end.

Another important satisfaction derived from the text is actual information about the sex act. In addition to the erotic enjoyment, for many readers the text provides knowledge on sexual technique which they

cannot get, or are too embarrassed to ask for, from parents or friends. This unexpected reason became evident to me in several of the individual interviews and particularly in the group interviews. Although about half of the initial, information-gathering interviews revealed the sexual scenes were not particularly important--indeed, in the Harlequins, teenage romances, and most of the adult novels, the sex is often euphemistically clothed in unthreatening terms anyway--perhaps a reluctance was felt to disclose this to an adult figure questioning them on a subject they, themselves, are struggling to understand and learn about. On the other hand, the balance of the sample and the group discussions revealed their interest in and enjoyment of the sexual explicitness. There is general agreement among the readers that the sex scenes are an important part of the book for reasons such as they demonstrate the couple's real love for each other, they provide incentive to keep reading (until one gets to another sex scene!), they add interest to the story, or they show emotion without going into a lot of detail, etc. In fact, one group session agreed that anyone who said she didn't read the books for the sex must be kidding.

What was a particular surprise to me, however, was the consensus that what the readers also sought was information on rules for showing affection and actual sex technique. Even though both the teenage and the adult romances cloak the sex act in euphemistic language, the readers learned basic information on rules for showing affection. For example, girls currently reading the teenage romances and readers who used to read the teenage books reflect on their earlier, teenage romances and explain that they sought from these books just basic information about: how do you know if a guy likes you, should you kiss a boy on the first date, will they hate you if you don't kiss

on the first date, how do you hug and when can you hug, how do you touch each other, etc. Lynne states, "I like the sex scenes a lot because I've never been sexually active and it's fun to see what it's going to be like." In a group conversation about learning sex technique, Jesse agreed that, "I always thought my parents would laugh if I asked the questions that were really on my mind." And Lynne elaborates, "I figured it was hard for my mom to tell me because I felt she was of a different generation. She wouldn't kiss on a first date but it's different today." And Christine adds, "The sex scenes answer questions that you couldn't even ask your best friend."

Even though the vicarious talk and learning about demonstrating affection are important dimensions sought in these adolescents' heterosexual awakening, by far the greatest enjoyment in the sexual scenes is, for these readers, to capture the feeling of being in love and being loved. The reading about simple affectionate acts and shared talk between two people in love, in addition to the actual performance of the sex act, serves also to fill, for some readers, the void they feel because they have no "boyfriend" relationship. Even in a culture where divorce affects half the marraiges and where, for example, television programming is beginning to reflect the single parent family, the ideal situation remains for my sample that a woman and a man should meet, fall in love, and get married. My data supports this notion as the prevelant ideal: all the readers asserted the ideal goal to be married, with no suggestion as to only a career being an alternative. (Again the sample reflects their conservative backgrounds and my presence could also easily affect their answers.)

In any case, the readers make a strong point for their desire to vicariously

enjoy a romantic relationship. Ashley Alexis states, "I love reading about the sex because I wonder what it will be like for me. They make it sound wonderful in the book. I can only wait until I'm married to find out..." Laurwren also notes the imagined relationship, "I started reading because I couldn't get dates and I wanted romance. I wanted the fantasy of it..." Agnes and Jesse both use the information to handle their relationships, "If I have trouble with a boyfriend, I see how she handles it in the book"and "It helps me deal with my own relationships with the opposite sex."

For almost all of my informants the pleasure of experiencing a romantic relationship through the reading of the romance means for them the "substitute relationship" experiencing of what they do not, in fact, enjoy in their actual lived experiences. Nancy's comment supports this very common point, "I am independent but when I see two people together or a couple, I get this lonely feeling so I read a romance novel or gothic novel to get away from my feelings. Then I feel better." Christine also states that, "Reading a romance makes you want to find a boyfriend...I never dated a lot...it filled the void." And finally, Lynne says, "I haven't dated...But now I can live through it...It gets old when friends talk about boyfriends."

Further, this point becomes even more evident in several of the responses which assert that the romances actually take the place of boyfriends. Nancy says, "When I am depressed and don't have a boyfriend, I read;" Ashley Alexis, "I noticed when I do have a boyfriend, I don't read...I stopped dating a guy about three months ago and I'm noticing I'm starting to read;" Kasey, "I broke up in the summer. I wanted to be free and I started reading romances like crazy: like, I never read them when we were dating."

Another common response centers even more on the vicarious, substitutive nature of the text for real experience. A strong point made in the individual interviews was the readers' dissatisfaction with the boys they knew at school, particularly during the junior high grades. It comes as no surprise to suggest that junior high boys can act silly around girls and in general be immature (!) As Ari-ane suggests, "Teenage guys are not mature or they are jerks...I would rather have a storybook hero fall in love with me than any guy in my school." An interesting phenomenon is revealed in these statements: the readers look to the text for the model of what a man is like or what showing affection is like and in fact, compare their perceptions of reality to these images. Their dissatisfaction with reality is, in fact, compounded when reality is perceived as deficient, that something is wrong with them or with another person because the image ideal does not correspond to reality.

This quality of enjoying the heterosexual relationships in the texts speaks to several of the readers in another, related way. In the teenage romances, which contain more true-to-life stories involving problems with same-sex and opposite-sex relationships, teachers, and parents in the junior high school setting, the heroine, or in some cases sisters or best friends as the two figures sharing the heroine "role", is portrayed as having a physical "flaw" or as being plain-looking. In the process of these teenage stories, therefore, we have a narrative structure which says even though a female is not a beauty, simply having a boyfriend will make her beautiful. Alexis explains a typical reflection on the teenage romance heroine, "The heroines usually have something wrong with them or they're plain...She's plain but pretty underneath, and the guy always sees the inner beauty...He'll see that beauty

the first time he sees her...When you read them, the guy's always so in love with the girl and it kind of makes you think, even if you're plain, you can have that. It just takes the right person." This quote supports Radway's (1984) findings with her adult readers--that the romance text functions, in one sense, to confirm the belief that having a man is the solution and that the books help resign women to their "place" in the patriarchy.

I want to suggest, therefore, that sexual pressures are a significant factor in the lived experiences of these adolescent females. The importance attached to being attractive and sexually appealing and to ultimately meeting a man and marrying are contained in the informants' responses. The social expectation that to have a boyfriend/husband signifies success coupled with the natural heterosexuality instincts of these maturing adolescents can be interpreted as being, to some degree, satisfied in the reading of the romance novel.

Also felt by the teenagers in my sample were social and economic pressures to succeed in the business world. The group discussions particularly elicited the concerns the students shared in feeling the need to please their parents by getting a college education, and by in turn, getting a job which will earn them a good living. Keeping in mind that my sample represents the conservative, academically-strong student from a strong middle-class, and in several cases upper-middle class family, it is not surprising that these teenagers feel they are expected to succeed career-wise, money-wise, and husband-wise. Jesse represents this common reservation about the future. "I know I'm going to college but college is scary because it's such a change...I feel a pressure of wanting to end up like my parents want me to be."

Lynne agrees. "It's up to you to study. I don't know what else to do except go to college. It's all I've ever been programmed to do."

At the same time, parental pressure to succeed seems to be measured by the parents in the ability of their daughter to get a job which will earn good money. Christine explains, "I see myself doing psychology but my parents say go where the money is. I see myself moving around--not in an office or a nine to five job. My parents say,'You have it too easy. You don't know how it would be if you didn't...' I see it as unfair. I love little kids and adopting kids would be neat too, maybe even better than having my own. I wonder what I'll think when I'm old..." Lynne has a similar pressure in her career choice of teaching, but she seems to feel a pressure that it might not be as challenging, perhaps prestigious, a job as something else. "May it's too safe--teaching. Maybe I'll have a double major--with English. Maybe it's too safe...It's not the money. I know I'll be married and have kids, maybe more than two." These statements are rich in underlying pressures and felt expectations. We have concerns expressed here about not only getting a job, but getting both a prestigious job and a job providing money. We have a hint in Lynne's statement that she is expected to have a challenging career, yet she professes the married life with children as her ultimate, inevitable career. And finally, we have in both these females, a sense that they have careers in mind that would be genuinely satisfying and fulfilling for them, but they necessarily feel the pressure of their parents and society to conform to another, better-paying profession. It is interesting to add that when asked if they planned to attend college, all but one (Her plans are to enter the Air Force in communications.), except a freshman and sophomore who felt no need to make up their mind yet, replied yes.

On a more personal, familial level, these teenagers felt, not surprisingly, a real need to resist their parents, fight brothers and sisters, and establish their own sense of independent behavior. A contradiction becomes readily apparent here; we have on the one hand the adolescents' expressed desire to please their parents through career choice yet they can't get along with them in the home. We are operating on two levels here: as the responses demonstrated, the felt need to please parents is a long-standing, subtle one probably demonstrated throughout a child's life, but the rebellion or "picked fights" with parents are, we will see explained in the following section, a temporary, natural phase in the maturation process.

I will not bore the reader with the substantial testimonies to awful brothers and sisters(To be fair, there were testimonies of girls who felt no problems in getting along with parents or brothers or sisters.) and to the unfair treatment the readers received and the preferential treatment their siblings always enjoyed. This is not to trivialize these felt injustices and genuine feelings of dislike for brothers and sisters, however. The following section will reveal that these feelings are a natural process in the maturation and identity-gaining process also.

What is significant is not that most of the sample felt or even acted in varying degrees of genuine rebellion to parental authority. What is significant is the age that they felt the need to rebel and to resist parents. The longer, life history interviews point up the significant fact of the virtual coinciding of the time when the readers began to argue with parents and the time they began to read the books. In the tracing of their life histories the readers, often without realizing it themselves, mentioned how,

in junior high they began reading and how, in junior high they began to resist parental authority. Of course, it becomes immediately obvious here that more research and analysis is needed to establish the link between these two coinciding incidents. The following section will point us in that direction, but for now, Ashley suggests the link, "Junior high was probably the two worst years of my life...I don't know why...Oh, by the way, that's when I <u>really</u> started reading these books."

It is more difficult in discussing the felt social and economic pressures[5] in these adolescents' lived experience to point to, as we were able to do in discussing sexual or heterosexual pressures, the text as embodiment of social, familial, and economic pressures. Indeed, some of the story lines, especially in the teenage romance lines, might present the working out or dealing with family or school problems, but it cannot be suggested that the romance "formula" has as a consistent narrative structure the facing of career choices, job pressures, sibling relationships, parental authority, etc. I can only suggest that given the common pressures put on young people to succeed professionally and personally as adults in today's culture, one choice open to the adolescent for pleasure, diversion, fantasy, and for most we could say escape, is to read formula fiction. This is only to suggest, in a very general way, that of all the forms of entertainment available to today's youth, some teenagers choose, as my romance readers have done, to read romances, not necessarily as their <u>only</u> form of leisure practice, but in order to accommodate such manifest or latent feelings as have already been suggested--identity pressures, heterosexual interests, and social and economic expectations.

Another, very important reason for reading these romances, not the most

hidden but still very obvious, is called to mind here. Certainly a share of the "pleasurable" domain goes to the sheer enjoyment of the reading practice, the feelings gained in entering the text, and the confidence gained from the "experiencing" of the real in the image. These explanations deserve their own discussion, which remains for the concluding section. But for now, we turn to some explorations of psychological theory of the adolescent to support the reasons which the readers themselves have presented.

SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR ROMANCES' APPEAL

This section's exploration of some psychological reasons taken from adolescent psychology will support and enhance our understanding of the readers' professed explanations just presented for reading the romance novel, as well as prepare us for the following, concluding portion of this paper dealing with the pleasure and substitute participation contained in the reading practice. Peter Blos, a renowned psychologist in adolescent psychology, utilizes the object-relations school of thought to explain the Western[6] adolescent's psychological development. He offers, first of all, the term "adolescence" as a term used to denote the psychological processes of adaptation to the condition of pubescence (1962, p 2), this phase representing just one phase in the continuum of psychosexual development. (1962, p 15)

For purposes of this study, however, the significant definition is that of "pubescence," that phase of development usually occurring between

ages ten and sixteen. (1962, pp 5-6) Blos defines pubescence as a state of sexual maturation, heterosexual interests, interests in adornment and personal display, disinterest in vigorous psysical activity (ie. games), and interest in imaginative and day-dreaming activities. (1962, p 2) He elaborates:

> Adolescent individuation is accompanied by feelings of isolation, loneliness, and confusion. Individuation brings some of the dearest megalomaniacal dreams of childhood to an irrevocable end. They must now be relegated entirely to fantasy: their fulfillments can never again be considered seriously. (my emphasis) The realization of the finality of the end of childhood, of the binding nature of commitments, of the definite limitation to individual existence itself--this realization creates a sense of urgency, fear, and panic.
>
> (1962, p 12)

Blos is arguing that "infantile dreams" are replaced with adolescent "fantasy." I want to argue, instead, that what is actually replaced is one kind of fantasy for another kind of fantasy, or the child's fantasy as truth or accepted possibility with the young adult's fantasy as recognized and "understood" fantasy. In other words, what Blos suggests is that the maturing adolescent, leaving childhood's belief and acceptance of any given possibility, must now use fantasy in a different way, given the realization of the limitations of reality. Nevertheless, the adolescent still uses fantasy but within the perceived appreciations of the limitations of reality.

The object-relations school of psychology offers a perspective, founded on Freud's notion of the unconscious and the Oedipal Complex, which, nevertheless, places importance on the human subject's ability to gain a sense of self-identity through the use of "transitional" objects. Object-relations theory argues that instead of a Freudian or Lacanian account of repressed desire and parental conflict, what is important is the relationship of children to their mothers.

Sons and daughters, during the pre-Oedipal stage, experience their mothers in a symbiotic way and both use transitional objects (as mediations between self and other) to separate from the duality. Further, an object-relations psychoanalytic criticism contends that works of art are not unconscious expressions of repressions but transitional objects which help persons secure a better sense of self, or self-in-relation, as they relate to the "outer, real world." In this sense, the artistic process is seen as a way to constitute reality and hence overcome feelings of anxiety in the conscious realm. Radway's seminal study, Reading the Romance, (1984) utilizes object-relations theory to explain that the romance reader "constructs" or "reads" the romance novel, as transitional object, as she struggles to confirm her self-in-relation or sense of self-identity in a patriarchal society.

I have argued throughout this paper that my particular sample of readers, female adolescents undergoing the natural, inevitable pressures of maturation in our culture, have chosen to read romances for such reasons as fantasy escape, for identification with characters in order to enjoy vicariously the "ideal other," and for knowledge and exploration of heterosexual relationships. I want to argue further, that the romance novel functions, as it does for Radway's Smithton Readers, as a transitional object allowing the readers their break with parental figures and their establishment of narcissistic formation which leads to a sense of self as mature adults. As Blos (1962) notes, "The phase of adolescence proper thus has two dominant themes: the revival of the oedipus complex and the disengagement from primary love objects. This process constitutes a sequence of object-relinquishment and object-finding both of which promote the establishment of the adult drive organization...It signals the advance of the libido to new objects." (pp 100-101)

Blos' (1962) theories on the fundamental shifts in the psyche of the maturing youth correspond to the concerns expressed and implied by the romance readers themselves. Just as we noted above the readers' sense of a need for identity, in particular an interest in the physical traits and social adeptness, which they derived from the identification with the novel's heroine figure, so also does psychological theory recognize this need. Blos (1962) notes, "A change of one's body image, and a re-evaluation of the self in the light of new physical powers and sensations are two of the psychological consequences of the change in physical status...And because the physical changes occurring during puberty are so marked and visible, the adolescent inevitably tends to compare his own bodily development with that of his contemporaries." (p 7) This comparison process can be also seen as occurring in the readers' interest in and identification with the "physical and social ideal" of the heroine.

The onset of this narcissistic feeling which coincides with the psychological split from the parents supports the readers' cultural beliefs and practices already discussed in relation to these books. Blos' (1962) contentions support our earlier findings, "The narcissistic quality of the adolescent's personality is well known...This transitory stage...is the consequence of the decathexis of the internalized parent, or, to be more exact, of its object representations. This results in primitive transient, identificatory processes which serve narcissistic as well as object-related needs...I have observed in several adolescents of this phase that hunger sensations of the need for food decreased startlingly at the time a meaningful and gratifying heterosexual object entered their life." (pp 90-91) Blos is speaking, first, to this study's finding that for most of our sample, the junior high years and on

into high school years are marked with disagreement and resistance to the parents. Blos (1962) also accounts for the inability to get along with siblings. "Early adolescence and adolescence proper must accomplish the renunciation of the primary love objects, the parents as sexual objects; siblings and parent substitutes have to be included in this process of renunciation. (p 75) And secondly, just as Blos(1962) notes a craving for food which is eased with a finding of a heterosexual object, so also can these readers be understood as having a "craving" for these novels which is alleviated when they find a boyfriend.

And our finding of heterosexual interests is also addressed in the adolescent psychological literature. "Heterosexual object finding, made possible by the abandonment of the narcissistic and bisexual positions, characterizes the psychological development of adolescence proper (p87)... the adolescent gradually turns to heterosexual love...the inner changes which are essential, indeed preconditional, for the advance to heterosexuality." (p 88)

It is true, of course, that we do not need psychological testimony to tell us that teenagers become interested in the opposite sex. But for purposes of this study, this fact is noted in order to show how the heterosexual pull affects the need for increased fantasy fulfillment. Blos (1962) is, in a sense, addressing this sample's habitual reading practices.

> An in-between territory in which the pull of narcissistic regression is counteracted by object-related ideation and keen perception of instinctual drives exists in the extraordinarily rich fantasy life and daydreaming of the adolescent. These fantasies implement the cathectic shifts by "trial action" as it were, and help the adolescent to assimilate in small doses the affective experiences toward which his progressive development is moving. Fantasy life and creativity at this stage are at a

> peak: artistic and ideational expression make it possible to communicate highly personal experiences which as such become a vehicle for social participation. The narcissistic component remains obvious; and indeed, narcissistic gratification derived from such creations is legitimate. Private fantasies can be compared to "trial action" because more often than not they are preparatory functions for initiating interpersonal transactions.
>
> (1962, p 92)

In other words, the need to break with parents, to establish a sense of self and to initiate heterosexual relationships are often given a "trial run" in the fantasizing of the adolescent. Recall the excitement and enthusiasm with which the romance readers described the heroine and testified to their feelings gained from entering into the text's sexual explicitness, romantic feelings, the "good talk" between the hero and heroine, etc. The reading practice functions, in this way, as a socialization process, as an opportunity to vicariously experience or live through all the desires they want to feel and behaviors they want to be able to do.

I want to conclude this discussion of the romance novel functioning as transitional, psychological object by suggesting that a link can be made between the biological, a-historical qualities of psychology and the historicity of cultural studies, in regards to the romance reading. What I want to argue is that even though psychology recognizes the human maturation process and the importance of ideal models for identification, these "ideal" models--whether of characters such as the heroines and heroes or of behaviors such as techniques of affection or ways of talking--are nevertheless socially-constructed. In other words, the romance text functions in two ways for the reader: psychologically, as transitional object containing the ideals of physical traits and desirable behaviors, and culturally, because these same physical traits and heterosexual behaviors are nonetheless determined by the

culture she lives in as the most desirable. And whereas the cultural studies approach allows us to recognize identity pressures, heterosexual interests, and social economic pressures as emanating from a culture's structure of feeling, so also does psychology recognize these as distinctly human activities. Blos (1962) agrees as to social determinants in the psychological process; "Biological needs and social conditions must be viewed as complementary: the former remain static and conservative; the latter appear changeable and fluid. Theoretically, there is no limit to the social variations by which the instinctual needs of man can be expressed." (p 203)

READING PRACTICE AS PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

My concluding argument takes a number of the explanations already offered for the appeal of the romance novel and moves them one step further. That is, I want to utilize such explanations as the nature of the romance novel as entertainment medium, the relatively isolated features of the reading practice, the reader's active identification with the text, and the psychological, substitute socialization process which is accomplished through the function of fantasy in adolescent maturation and suggest that, in addition to these reasons, the romance reader also uses the text as means to genuine personal empowerment. The reader actively interprets the text and uses it to provide a first, "lived" experience for those cultural expectations and social behaviors which she has yet to face and actually perform and but which she knows she is expected to execute. Rather than "adult" feelings of feminine defeat, or of revenge toward the male, patriarchal social system, or of needs for nurturance (or in addition to these), the teenage reader, instead,

constructs the fantasy images of the romance story in order to, as it were, "live them through" first in the reading so that when faced with the actual experience, she enters into the "real" setting having felt she has already "done it" through the text.

Interpreting the reading practice as a uniquely-personal, individualized activity facilitates the notion that the teenage reader actively constructs the text. Unlike a film or a television show which presents the visual image for the viewer and which even positions the camera in order to construct the viewpoint of the audience, the written word of the text waits to be "filled" by the imagination of the reader. For example, Sophia Kristianna notes, "I see it the way I want to see it." One of the group sessions also enthusiastically revealed that many readers will, in fact, ignore the physical characteristics offered in the text of the hero and heroine and imagine their own physical attributes. "Yes, the hero is always blond with blue eyes to me" or "No, the heroine always has for me, long black hair and green eyes." It would appear, that unlike the visual constraints of film or television or for example, Morley's [ ] ethnography of family television viewing which notes the use of television viewing as reward, scapegoat, etc.,the romance reader creates her own fantasy images, even contradicting the dictates of the text, and uses the reading practice as her own personal "space" and "time." [7]

We have noted already the importance of fantasy as both entertainment and diversion from "boring" surroundings and as natural heterosexual development accommodating the leaving of childhood fantasies for adult, reality-controlled fantasies, which also encourages the intense participation in

the text. In addition to these reasons, McRobbie (1982) also informs through cultural studies analysis why these female adolescents so actively enter the fantasy of reading. McRobbie' feminist critiques of male-oriented subculture study (1980; 1982) and her work in understanding dance in the young British woman's lived experience ( ) demonstrate that a young woman struggling to find her role and personal identity in a consumer-oriented, materialist culture nevertheless experiences gender as the overdetermined social factor pressuring her. We have noted above that cultural images through advertisements, film images, television shows, etc. communicate to young women the importance of gender considerations, but it is the readers' responses themselves which have revealed the real pressure the readers feel to be "gender-perfect." For example, the social pressure to know the correct ways to show affection, identity pressures to be physically attractive, curiousity about knowing techniques of sex, the social pressures on mate relationships all point to the pre-occupation within these students' lived experiences of gender considerations and what it means to be a woman in our society. McRobbie (1982) has revealed that she has come to realize that gender considerations, more so than class distinctions, are the over-determined social force in young women's lived experience.

Understanding the over-determination of gender relations points to why the romance reading practice might be considered as more than just a socialization practice (although it is that also). More than just a means to gain knowledge, the reading functions to accommodate these concerns of gender pressures and to provide, for these readers, an active outlet to investigate, to live through, and to experience these felt constraints. The responses of the readers demonstrate this "extra" process of active participation by stating that the

reading event is to experience the "un-experienced" and by explaining how they have changed their feelings and behaviors based on the reading of the texts. The power of the novel is its ability to provide the first, "lived" experience from which to draw on for the second (actually lived or first) experience: in other words, having "done it" once in the text, they feel they can really do it for the second (first) time.

What I am suggesting here involves more than socialization and more than the above descriptions of heroine identification, enjoyment of "good talk" or fights, or learning rules for affection. I want to argue that for most of the readers in my sample, the reading practice involves their complete immersion into the text and a pseudo-experience of the real. Many readers explained that they talked back to the books, threw books across the room in frustration at events in the story, felt intense love or hate for characters, and a frequent response, often cried when reading. When readers reveal they gain a special feeling, that they read to get this feeling, that they can recover a feeling just by seeing a particular book on a shelf, or carry a feeling around for several days, something greater is being experienced here than simple quest for knowledge or socialization practice.

Lynne says, "It's a chance to live a life you've always wanted to but never dreamed of...you put yourself in the place of the characters." Ashley Alexis says, "I can put myself in place of the girl and pretend I'm on my own and a rich, gorgeous, older man is crazy about me." Sophia Kristianna says, "I like to dream, to be in the books...life's a pain...I look in the book for a guy." And Bridget, who has read almost a thousand books and keeps her own card catalog, says, "I feel lonely...like there's no one out there...

In the books people always realize what you're going through...In real life they don't...In the books I feel like I'm right there...I feel excited about what's going to happen next." These responses indicate two dimensions to the quest for experience, on one hand, reading to experience what you hope to live through one day and on the other, as in Bridget's case, reading to experience what you suspect you will not ever feel or experience.

Perhaps the best proof of the emotional engagement is in how the informants report their changed behavior and feelings, given the reading experience. Ari-ane says, "When you're living the books (my emphasis), you want to be like them...I'm growing my hair because every book has long hair." Sophia says, "Sometimes I act snobby like the woman for a few days...and also I wear a lot of red and black or pink and lace, like the women in the books." Morgan also says she feels "like a snot" or conceited for a couple of days. Ashley says that she has learned to argue from the books, "I guess I've changed... the characters argue so much...I argue with my parents and my friends when I would never do that before...before I would back down and let them win but now I fight til I win...I never used to argue." Several girls believe they got the courage from these books to initiate conversations with guys. Lynne says, "Before I read Rosemary Rogers and others, I hardly ever talked to guys...because the heroines are so adventuresome, I find myself flirting a little more...I never would have before."

These statements of personal empowerment suggest that for these adolescents, the fantasy image may be more influential than the real. The reader actively pursues a meaning in these texts rather than simply experiencing a discourse written through them (as the"feminist defeatist" critics imply). Recall some

readers' statements that they would rather have a storybook hero fall in love with them than any guy in their school. Note their identification with and imitation of characters and behavior. Post-modern theory has told us lately that cultural images and social models are dictating the "real" more than the real. (Grossberg,). Baudrillard's (1981; 1984) notion of "implosion"--that the real has gone and the image has replaced it--argues that no real meaning exists between reality and image any more, that the real and the image are becoming indistinguishable.

I do not feel comfortable, with the data I have on hand to argue that this sample has, indeed, approached any of Baudrillard's three orders of simulacra--the hyper-real, the reality under the sign, or the image/reality moment. Follow-up research can investigate more carefully the intricate ways the readers are constructing and internalizing the romance texts. But I do want to argue that these teenage readers are reading these novels in ways unique to their lived and felt experiences. Further, a fundamental, personally-empowering explanation for reading romances is to experience "first" in the reading practice, those behaviors and feelings which they are, later, the second time in real life, able to perform better. Having experienced and faced the pressures, problems, and delights of the text means to face them for the "second" time.And it can also mean facing them for the only time.

NOTES

1 I want to thank the young women of Bloomington High School, Bloomington, Illinois, and Normal Community High School, Normal, Illinois, who generously gave of their time to share with me their thoughts and feelings about their reading of romance novels: (their chosen pseudonyms) Agnes, Alexis, Ari-ane, Ashleigh, Ashley, Ashley Alexis, Bridget, Christine, Jesse, Kasey, Kirchell, Laurwren, Lynne, Morgan, Nancy, Sophia Kristianna, Stepnanie, Tracy. I want to thank Professor Alma Gottlieb, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, for instruction in fieldwork research methods and Professor Lawrence Grossberg, for the direction and focus he gave this project.

2 This is not to deny that today's male adolescent is experiencing the same external pressures and internal conflicts.

3 The parents'questionnaires confirm age of beginning to read. Instructions to the parents were not to talk to daughters before filling out, and of course, there is no guarantee that they did. But of all the responses, from ten sets of parents, age was only off by one year in a few cases.

4 This notion that marriage is the socially-accepted practice might be challenged today on several fronts. But to these students, marriage was the acceptable and desired goal, although two argued that they never wanted children--perhaps some sign of a shift in "acceptable" marriage practices here.

5 When asked about pressures felt on them, no informant volunteered world or current affairs as an important, relevant worry to her. When I had to ask them if they worried about current affairs, Lynne answered for the group, "No. Never. I think I should but I don't. It's really too depressing."

6 Blos (1962) notes throughout his work that he is theorizing about the Western adolescent. (See for example, p 203)

7 Radway (1984) makes this point very well in her study of adult readers also.

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Appendix A

Introductory Questionnaire

Date_____

Name_____

Address_____

_____

Phone_____

High School_____

Year in School_____

Age_____Sex_____

1. Approximately how many romance novels have you read?

   About how many romances do you read every month?

   Do you read more romances during the summer or during the school year?

2. At what age did you begin to read romances?

   How did you get started in reading romances? a teacher? a friend? a parent? other influences?

3. What kind of romance novels do you prefer--one or more of the following? Harlequins? Historical romances? Gothic romances? "Bodice-rippers? Others?

   Do you choose romances according to the author, for example, Danielle Steele or Jackie Collins, etc.?

(con't)

Appendix A (con't)

4. Do you read romances that are readily available or do you seek out or buy a particular kind of romance?

5. Do you read other popular fiction books for pleasure besides romances?

What magazines do you read for pleasure?

6. When do you do most of your reading of romances--one or more of the following. weekends? late at night? during school? when you are supposed to be doing homework? other times?

7. What is your favorite part of the romance--one or more of the following. the characters? the happy endings? the settings? the plot? the love scenes? the interactions between the characters? the fights/ disagreements? other things?

8. What, do you think, is (are) the main reason(s) that you read romance novels?

Thank you very much for your cooperation in filling out this questionnaire. I appreciate your candid responses and look forward to interviewing you in person to explore further your interest in reading romance novels.

Mary Anne Moffitt
Institute for Communications Research
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Mary Anne Moffitt

Appendix B

Note: please note that the questions listed below are merely suggestions of the kind of questions asked and the rough order of the questions. In every case adaptation had to be made, more questions and probing for some and for some reluctant subjects, less follow-up techniques.

Got questionnaire?

Preference for pseudonym? significance of name?

Any questions about questionnaire? go through it.

So, let me ask some particular about the books.

What are qualities of heroine/girl? What is she like?

What does she look like? act like?

Can you remember a particular book or particular girl--what was she like?

What is the hero like?

What does he look like? act like? In the beginning?

Does he change during the book?

What do you like about how they get along?

How are they at the beginning? at the end?

What is the ideal relationship?

How do the books end?

Do you like the sexual scense?

What is the best part of the story?

Why do you think you like to read them?

If you were not reading a romance novel, what else would you read? What do you like about just reading?

When did you begin reading?

How did you get the idea to read a romance novel--what got you started?

(con't)

Appendix B (con't)

Describe the typical book/story.

How are books different from real life?

What events are real?

What are different from real life?

Are these qualities (different and same) what attract you to books?

How do you feel when you read them?

Do you change "inside," or have different feeling about yourself in reading of books?

Why do you read them, do you think?

Have you ever started to read a book and then did not like it--do you finish it then?

Does your mother read them? Do your parents care if you read the novels?

Do you discuss books with friends?

Review of personal things:
year in school

favorite subject

like to read in general?

going to college? what will be major?

grades in school?

do you have a boyfriend?

do you fantasize your relationship from reading the books?

what kind of man would be your ideal man? look like? act like?

What else do you do for leisure time?

Do you watch soap operas?

Other television show you like?

Appendix C

MOTHER FATHER

Did you know that your daughter read romance novels before I began this study or even before I sent you this letter?

How do you define a romance novel? In other words, what do you think, are the typical features of a romance novel--characters, story line, ending, etc.?

How many books does your daughter read--say, for example, in a month or in all of last year, etc.? _____

Does she usually buy them or borrow them from other readers?

At what age did she begin to read these books?_____

What, do you think, introduced her to the reading of romances?

In your opinion, why does your daughter read romance novels?

What particular features about the books, make them so attractive as a way to fill leisure time?

Do you read romance novels yourself? _____How many?_____

PLEASE USE THE BACK OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO ADD ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS YOU